

Weld Producer Food Hub

**Operational Handbook
Issues and Action Steps**

4/12/2013

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Weld Producer Food Hub Project Overview

Food hubs are traditionally thought of as one building containing all services and functions that producers and buyers need, and the Weld Producer Food Hub project was no different. However, acquiring infrastructure, equipment, personnel, and expertise in the myriad of components that encompass a food hub is costly and doesn't occur overnight.

It is also highly likely that there are community businesses and organizations having under-utilized buildings, equipment and personnel capacity willing to provide mutually beneficial food hub associated services. By thinking outside the box, Healthy Weld 2020 has discovered it is possible that food hub operational and service functions could be fulfilled by multiple existing community partners, while other functions and services are developed.

During 2010-2011, much of the food hub start-up market research (consumer supply and demand needs and fulfillment, available services, food safety requirements for participating producers and a food hub, etc.) was completed. The expectation was that 2012-2013 would include identifying a producer who had sufficient existing infrastructure and willingness to house a food hub facility, with the intention of having it operational for crop year 2013.

The grant outcomes are different than intended because of four issues: 1) producer challenges to developing an operational food hub facility, 2) producer perceptions that because the Healthy Weld 2020 Program is part of the Weld County Department of Public Health & Environment they play a regulatory role and not an educational/technical assistance role, 3) farm barriers precluding producers from participating in a food hub and 4) producer insurance complications.

What We Didn't Know....

❖ Issue 1: Producer Challenges to Developing a Food Hub Facility

Healthy Weld 2020 knew there was not an existing food hub in operation in Weld County. Interested producers were identified that might be partners in the food hub, but economic barriers became evident – both in the CSU Feasibility Study and within each producer's financial stability, which revealed itself as conversations progressed. Two Producers were identified as potential aggregation facilities.

- Boyles Family Farms - had limited existing infrastructure that could have been expanded with a mini-grant. However, Boyles Family Farms decided not to participate with the pilot 'hub' project after the CSU Food Hub Economic Feasibility Study results were revealed. Since that time Boyles has closed their production, and sold most of the land and equipment due to economic issues.
- Glovers 18th St Discount Grocery – also faced economic challenges, as well as family changes that precipitated with a reluctance to continue store management, and eventually sold their operation. The store location had capacity to be an aggregation facility, as well as a minimal processor and distribution facility.

At the time, Healthy Weld 2020 had a limited producer network to work with, making it difficult to find others who might want to participate in a food hub, partly due to the CSU Economic Feasibility Study and partly due to Issue 2, discussed below.

❖ Issue 2: Challenges to Developing Producer Rapport

The increased prevalence of produce-related foodborne illness outbreaks has made producers aware of the emerging requirement to document food safety protocols on the farm. However, at this time, there are still sufficient marketplace opportunities available for producers *not* having a food safety plan, to warrant change.

Developing producer rapport is a multi-part issue revolving around misperceptions regarding Healthy Weld 2020's function at the Department of Public Health & Environment, and also relates to Weld County's geographic size, and the county's producer culture. Each is briefly summarized below:

Healthy Weld 2020 Misperceptions:

- Healthy Weld 2020 and others are at the forefront of educating producers about food safety requirements and preparing them to be competitive in the changing environment. Although Healthy Weld 2020 is a program of the Health Communication, Education and Planning Division of the Weld County Department of Public Health & Environment, most people's immediate thought is *regulatory*, not educational and technical assistance. Consequently, there is an initial reluctant acceptance by farmers until a relationship is established.

Weld County:

- **Vast geography** - 4000 square miles (twice the size of the state of Delaware)
- **Huge livestock production** –the Weld County website states that of the county's "[...2.5 million acres of \[agricultural lands\] ... 75% is devoted to farming and raising livestock.](#)"
- **Significant number of small produce growers** – typically guarded, cautious business men and women, reluctant in sharing much of their farm operation details with others, including their peers.

Weld County Producer Culture:

- **Communication methods** – because most producers’ work schedules aren’t conducive to using email, phone and computers, they aren’t heavily reliant on technology for their primary communication method. Producers prefer a more traditional type of business model: personable, verbal, face-to-face, non-technology oriented communication.

❖ Issue 3: Farm Barriers Identified

For those producers who are interested in participating in the Farm to School, Farm to Institution and retail marketplaces, Healthy Weld 2020 identified three farm barrier issues that limited or prevented producers:

- **Crop volume** - small(er) scale individual farm infrastructure is a limiting factor in supporting producer ability to meet the volume local produce demands.
- **Transportation logistics** – due to lack of transportation infrastructure, it is problematic for producers to move product to buyers. Weld County’s expansive geographic area also plays a role.
- **Compliance factor** – educational programs and technical resources are lacking to assist small producers meeting: food safety, liability insurance and other barriers. Examples include: production related issues and post- harvest crop handling (field sorting and packing standards).

❖ Issue 4: Producer Insurance

Insurance is often required in commercial marketplaces and may consist of more than one-type of insurance with most insurance requirements often set by the Buyer and Marketplace. Basic descriptions of insurances are as follows:

- **General Liability** is designed to cover risks that may include bodily injury or property damage caused by direct or indirect actions of the insured. It may included covering activities considered ‘farming,’ which may include the sale of produce in its raw, unprocessed state, whether sold on-farm or at a farmers’ market.
- **Product Liability Insurance** protects claims of injury from contaminated fresh produce that causes foodborne illness. Often, producers assume that the general liability policy protects against these claims. However since most of these claims occur off farm premises, an additional Product Liability would be required.
- **Commercial Business Liability Insurance** may be necessary if the producer undertakes activities that are not considered ‘agricultural or farming,’ usually supporting operations that consist of fresh-produce processing or producers that sell products that are not grown by them.
- **Product Recall Insurance** generally covers actual or direct costs associated with a product recall.

Investigating what kind of insurance policies could support small to mid-size producers participating in a Producer Food Hub, what became clear is that there are no simple solutions. Most insurance policies directly benefit the insured. Off-setting risks require that each player in the supply chain

carry the same value of insurance. What becomes cost prohibitive for most producers, especially in the institutional marketplace, are the higher insurance requirements as well as potential additional insurance requirements. Retail establishments often require providers to carry Product Liability insurance to protect claims against injured parties; however Product Liability only covers those claims and does not cover Product recall costs.

What is Currently Happening...

Below is a summary of various partner activities are taking place related to farm to school and local purchasing in the Northern Colorado. Although this brief discussion is not expected to be all-inclusive, it does show the growth that has been accomplished. Healthy Weld 2020 is currently collaborating with or has future plans to partner with each of these entities.

❖ Farm to School and Food Banks

Weld County School District 6

Healthy Weld 2020 has known for several years that Weld County School District 6 (WCSD6) has had plans to create and operate as a School District Food Hub through the Northern Colorado (purchasing) Cooperative. WCSD6 has underused cooler/freezer storage capacity and have actively been making steps towards a food hub operation:

- 2011 LiveWell grant – provided for Central Production Kitchen renovation to allow for expanded scratch cooking production as well as self-processing of farm fresh produce items. The kitchen renovation allowed the district to put into place the necessary systems and equipment required to minimally process various produce items for the District’s in-season use as well as limited extended season processing.
- 2012 USDA Farm to School Implementation grant – will purchase processing equipment for season extension processing and retrofit freezer space to cooler space for increased capacity. Through these expansion efforts, WCSD6 Food Hub will serve as an exclusive aggregator, processor and distributor of all Farm to School produce in Weld County.

Weld County Re-8 School District - Ft. Lupton

The Re-8 School District was a recipient of the 2012 USDA Farm to School Planning grant. Grant outcomes include outreach efforts to farms, increased farmer participation and purchasing equipment to allow for crop processing and storage.

Northern Colorado (purchasing) Cooperative

A thirteen school district-strong purchasing cooperative including school districts along the Front Range and Cheyenne, Wyoming, that each year posts a cooperative-wide Farm to School bid. Six Weld County school districts are participating in this purchasing cooperative.

Weld Food Bank and Food Bank for Larimer County

In 2013, the Larimer and Weld food banks have partnered with their local school district to purchase produce through the bid process. All five Colorado food banks make up the Feeding Colorado network, and actively work with Northern Colorado producers for donations and sourcing foods.

The Food Bank for Larimer County has a long history of purchasing locally. In Weld County, local purchasing is an identified growth area. Both of these food banks bring a long history of producer networking to Healthy Weld 2020.

❖ **Producers and Producer Support Services**

Berry Patch Farms

Tim Ferrell, owner of Berry Patch Farms, is a leader in the farming community and is opening his farm to other producers for a CSU and partners- led food safety training in April 2013. On farm efforts like this are an identified strategy for our work in 2013-2014, and Berry Patch farms has offered to recruit farmers and host future events for the food hub project.

Leffler Family Farms

Leffler Family Farms will be using grant funding to purchase equipment for the expansion of farm operations and to train other producers in the area. Leffler Family Farms will utilize their expertise in farm processing, Farm to School operations and regional marketplace opportunities to assist other farmers in market entry and food processing. The partnership with Leffler Family Farms is a first step in developing relationships with other farms and will provide a basis for the transition to multiple on-farm processing locations as the food hub expands in the future.

LoCo Food Distribution – Fort Collins

This is a 2011 startup local food distribution business that has been gaining momentum during this time period. Currently, they offer on-farm pick up of products and delivery to customers along the Front Range. They had limited infrastructure for pick-up, and had no facility to serve as an aggregation point, or for processing of products before delivery when Healthy Weld 2020 was first introduced to them, but since then have obtained warehouse space (with no processing capability). Producers are required to provide processed, labeled product for distribution. As a pilot program, HW2020 provided a mini-grant to improve existing inventory management and online ordering and provide trace-back capability (which they didn't have before).

Source Local Foods – Broomfield

Also started in 2011, Source Local Foods is a local food distribution company that serves the Front Range. Healthy Weld 2020 was introduced to them at the 2013 Northern Colorado (purchasing) Cooperative Farm to School pre-bid conference. Not only do they provide on-farm pickup and delivery to clients, they also are available for employ as a 3rd party distributor for non-clients.

What was Accomplished - 2012-2013 Activities

Below is a summary of the various activities Healthy Weld 2020 undertook to advance the food hub project.

❖ **Food Hub Functions Mapped: Activities & Services and Operational**

The Northern Colorado Producer Hub Advisory Panel was convened from representatives of the producer, buyer and distributor sectors to assist Healthy Weld 2020 (with the assistance of Julia Erlbaum, Real Food Colorado) in the development of the food hub. The panel was charged with

providing critical input on issues essential in the identification and development of food hub operational protocols that would aid producers in connecting with the food hub. Issues evaluated included:

- Operational formation, design, and function
- Services
- Location
- Training and Education
- Collaborative Partners
- Funding
- Sustainability

Monthly meetings were held between June 2012 and February 2013. Meeting outcomes relating to the identification of what kind of producer food hub would best serve the producers were discussed. From the first meeting, the food hub goals focused on three main topics: marketing, education, and food hub systems.

As the Panel began to articulate what each of those topics encompassed from each sector’s point of view, multiple characteristics surfaced that were vital to a successful food hub. Characteristics can be divided into two broad categories: Activities and Services, and Operational Services. They are summarized below and in Appendix 2.

Food Hub Activities & Services - Mapping Document				
Marketing Services	Product Technical Assistance <small>(Hub provides or finds partners who can)</small>	Product Differentiation Strategies		Community Services
Producer	Production Planning	Identity Preservation		Consumer Education (Why Buy Local)
* Guaranteed Market		* Product Origin (Locality)		* Support Farms
* Widespread Marketing Promotion	Contract Growing Assistance	* Producer History		* Nutritional Value of Food
* Fair Prices				
* Business Tools (eCommerce)	Season Extension	Group Branding		Nutrition/Cooking Education Classes
* Liability Insurance				
* Coordinated Supply Chain Activities	Sustainable Production Practices	Product Attributes		Food Bank/Food Assistance Organization Donations
* Access to Larger Food Distributors	* Certified Organic	* Heirloom/Unusual Variety	* Grass Fed/Range Free	
	* Minimal Pesticides	* Vegetarian	* Certified Organic	
	* Naturally Raised (meat & poultry)	* Vegan	* Non-GMO	
		* Gluten Free	* Naturally Raised	Increase Healthy Access to Underserved Areas
Buyer	Handling Practices	* Kosher	* Minimal Pesticides	* SNAP/EBT Redemption
* Single Point of Purchase	* Post Harvest	Grown with Sustainable Production Practices		Educational Farm Tours(?)
* Billing/Receiving	* Production			
* Reduced Transactions/Costs				Employment/Internship Opportunities (?)
* Local Source Identification	Competitive Pricing through Season			
* Food Safety Reviewed				
* Diversified Products	Food Safety			
* Year Round Access	* Training			
	* Plan Development			
	* Farm Visit			
	* Non-Certified 3rd Party Audit			
	* Traceability			
	Liability Insurance			

Activities and Services are both producer and buyer focused.

- **Marketing services** – to, and for producers and buyers—promoting food hub participation to each group, as well as advertising local products to multiple marketplaces.

- **Product Technical Assistance** – primarily a producer-focused service, these benefit the buyer by ensuring the supply/demand volume is met through crop planning and other resources.
- **Product Differentiation Strategies** – knowing product source characteristics.
- **Community Services** – helping educate/support/sustain the community through various community engagement activities.

Food Hub Operational Services - Mapping Document			
Aggregation Services*	Operational Functions	Food Value Chain - Shared Partner Values (what drives partners to be part of Food Hub)	
		Shared Mission Values	Shared Operational Values
Phase 1 Pass-through facility (Warehousing/Storage)	Year Round or Seasonal	ex. * Healthy Food Access	ex. * Transparency through all Food Hub Segments
Advisory Panel identified Characteristics	Considerations for each:	* Farmland Preservation	* Long Term Commitment
* Located on major travel corridors- I-25 & HWY 85	* Customer Retention	* Farm Viability	* Open Communication
* Self-service	* Off Season Facility Use	* Sustainable Production Practices	* Accountability
* Minimal staffing	If Year Round:		
* Rent-a-pallet/surrogate storage for buyers	* Off Season - buy outside region		
* Delivery services	* Diversified Products - examples:		
* Food Safety Program	Meat/Poultry		
* Cost Control- competitive pricing	Dairy		
* Product Standards-specs	Eggs		
* Other Services	Value-Added Products (Baked Goods, etc)		
* Automated Services: online ordering	Honey/Sauces		
* Billing Payment: Producers and buyers education component assisting with reasonable payment expectations (timelines) and proper procedures in place before selling (pre bid meetings)	Technology		
	* Business Management (e-Commerce)		
	* Traceability (Food Safety)		
	* Producer Profiles/Product Info		
Phase 2 Packing Shed:	Product Handling		
Advisory Panel identified characteristics:	* Requirements by Classification		
* Delivery System			
* Food Safety Program	Food Safety		
* Cost Control	* Facility Licensing		
* Standards- Specs	* Liability Insurance		
* Producer Friendly	* Product Classification Certifications		
* Farm Identification			
* Traceability	Financial Structure		
* Other services			
Multiple Satellite Sites	Farmer Engagement		
Food Safety Review of Approved Producers			

* Identified by the Weld Producer Food Hub Advisory Panel

Operational Services ultimately serve the buyer, but are geared to address limitations in individual producer’s operations.

- **Aggregation Services** - ultimately addresses the three farm barriers identified above.
- **Operational Functions** – are facility-related considerations that pertain to the food hub’s resource sustainability and financial viability.
- **Food Value Chain – Shared Partner Values** – the social and operational values that collaborative business partners share.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest need was for a centralized aggregation capacity facility that can provide: 1) producer facility infrastructure support, 2) storage for volume and (sorting and

packaging) consistency of product, while offering consistency in meeting and maintaining food safety standards and 3) distributor logistical needs support.

A packing shed facility offering the varied aggregation services outlined would simplify and enhance the local marketplace purchasing opportunities for all involved. However, the complexities of forming a packing shed facility were determined to be cost prohibitive at this time. So, the Food Hub Advisory Panel identified a Pass-Through Facility as an interim step to attaining a food hub with packing shed capabilities. The rationale was that even a limited-service aggregation facility, would improve the ability of producers to move or expand into various marketplaces.

Two models were discussed:

- A shared use modified refrigerated trailer to provide compartmented self-storage space. This type of unit would require a permanent power connection and would likely have smaller storage capacity, requiring more frequent product pick-up during high harvest periods.
- A pass-through facility – similar to a ‘rent-a-pallet’ storage space. Provides for producer delivery to pass-through facility, with distributor pick-up and transport to buyer OR buyer direct pick-up.

For either model described, protocols will need to be developed, such as access, costs, maintenance and storage protocols (certain produce cannot be stored in shared ventilation due to absorption) among others. Since 2013-2014 will focus on development of the pass- through facility, more details are below.

Pass-Through Aggregation Facility

This type of facility will be a 24-hour, self-storage, short term storage facility with a permanent power source. Producers will drop off product that is sold, packaged and invoiced for delivery to the customer. All product washing, grading, packaging, and associated preparations must take place off-site. One or more third party distributors will also have access to the facility to pick up product(s) and deliver to the designated customer. The 24 hour accessibility will accommodate both producer harvest schedules and distributor delivery deadlines.

Because of identified producer transportation distances to the aggregation facility (15 miles one way), the geographic locations of producers, and delivery transportation corridors, multiple satellite facilities are desired with easy highway access.

❖ Colorado Produce Growers Food Safety Plan Workshop – April 24, 2012

Real Food Colorado, with technical assistance from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado State University Extension, and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union Educational and Charitable Foundation held a series of four 4.5 hour workshops throughout Colorado. Healthy Weld 2020 Program and CSU Extension Weld County were Northern Region Partners in the Weld County workshop, and provided meeting space and regional technical resources specific to local producers.

The workshop objectives were to inform and assist small to mid-sized producers on the importance of having a food safety plan, and provide them support and resources to develop their own farm food safety plan. Food safety plan development documents and resources were provided to participants in paper form and on a USB drive for future reference. Complete workshop documents can be found at

<http://www.healthyweld2020.com/FoodHubs.html> .

Real Food Colorado Food Safety Workshop Background

On-farm food safety plans became a focus of Real Food Colorado (RFCO) through stakeholder feedback from RFCO's 2010 and 2011 *Connecting Local Farms and Schools* (CLFS) Conferences and RFCO's on-the-ground work with local school districts and producers through the Colorado Farm to School initiatives. It was identified that one significant barrier for most small to mid-sized produce growers' ability to expand into wholesale and institutional marketplaces is their ability to provide documented food safety plans. Though there are multiple resources that advocate, as well as provide access to information on the need for food safety plans and implementation methods, it has been tutorial workshops that have produced a positive impact on producers with the ability to place "pen to paper" with interactive relationship and technical assistance with experts in the field. Though the CLFS Conference's workshops focused on food safety, one of the primary requests that came direct from producers was the request for hands-on-tutorial guidance on the development of on-farm food safety plans.

Food safety has become of paramount importance especially with institutional buyers such as school districts, who have increased their direct-from-producers purchases. RFCO is currently working on several projects focused on local producers' ability to work with institutional buyers (such as schools) within the institutional procurement framework, which includes navigating the realm of food safety. Institutions are usually governed by hearty and complicated rules and regulations that require necessary documentation that, if lacking, can eliminate local produce growers in farm to institution sales. With recent development in the area of food safety concerns of fresh produce products, there is a sense of urgency to directly engage Colorado produce growers in their ability to adhere to current and upcoming food safety measurements. In addition, Colorado produce growers will need to meet food safety guidelines given the pending releases from the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act concerning mandatory produce safety standards.

RFCO partnered with Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) Fruit and Vegetable Section and Colorado State University (CSU) Extension in developing a Colorado on-farm food safety curriculum addressing the understanding and awareness of Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) as well as the development of on farm food safety practices.

RFCO learned much from this project and offers the following insights:

- Future Workshops may consider providing "technical assistance" in specific areas of food safety and risk assessment such as worker hygiene and training, traceability issues and water source issues.

- Timing of Workshops should be in consideration of the agriculture season. The Workshops occurred about a month later to follow the CSU food safety webinar.

Some producers are more comfortable with one-on-one or smaller group interactions, which may pose a structural issue if hosting a Workshop in an open room format. Formatting for future Workshops may need to take into account the “culture” of certain regional growers and provide a compatible environment structure that would aid in offering a comfort zone to fully interact with the Workshop curriculum.

❖ **Producer GIS Mapping October 2012**

Considering the pass-through facility requirements above, a preliminary GIS logistical analysis of WCSD6 Central Production Kitchen, the Food Bank for Larimer County and the Weld Food Bank locations was conducted compared to previously identified producers. These locations were chosen due to their interest in participating in the Food Hub Project and their potential under-utilized cooler capacity. The Gilcrest School District was also chosen as a representative fourth site to evaluate the county-relative proximity to serve south Weld County and North Adams County producers.

Results showed that although WCSD6 and Weld Food Bank would serve the same producers due to their locations, and therefore one or the other could serve as a pass-through facility, the Food Bank for Larimer County and a south-central location similar to Gilcrest School District would likely meet producers and distributors needs well. See Appendix 3 for maps.

❖ **Food Safety & Farm to School Procurement Document – December 2012**

A report to assist small to mid-sized produce growers in understanding the Colorado food safety regulations, how they apply to produce products, and the Farm to school procurement process with specific attention to explaining geographic preference. This report was commissioned by Real Food Colorado for another client and was provided to Healthy Weld 2020 as a Northern Colorado producer resource. The report can be found in Appendix 4

❖ **Cultivation Event - December 6, 2012**

Healthy Weld 2020 sponsored the first-ever marketplace networking opportunity for Northern Colorado producers and purchasers to cultivate business relationships with farm to school and wholesale purchasers interested in sourcing Colorado products. This meeting was held in conjunction with the Northern Colorado (purchasing) Cooperative’s monthly meeting. Producer and purchaser specific resources were created with the assistance of Real Food Colorado and provided to attendees to facilitate conversations. Additional resources were provided by Real Food Colorado to help attendees become familiar with institutional purchasing practices.

The networking format was similar to speed dating, to allow each buyer to meet each producer. A total of 12 unique purchasers (2 were distributors, but for this purpose, considered themselves to represent the purchaser group) and 4 unique producers attended the cultivation event. The event was well received based on survey responses. Attendees found the event worthwhile with most making business contacts, and the majority would like to see future events on a quarterly basis.

Challenges to this event are discussed in the Lessons Learned section below.

The cultivation event flyer and survey responses are included in Appendix 5. All resources mentioned can be found at <http://healthyweld2020.com/FoodHubs.html>.

❖ **Colorado Farm to School Task Force Presentation - January 24, 2013**

Healthy Weld 2020 gave a presentation to the Colorado Farm to School Task Force briefly describing the food hub activities from 2010 to 2013.

❖ **Weld Producer Food Hub Brochure**

After recognizing that the producer culture of acceptance of Healthy Weld 2020 was low, a brochure was created to begin handing out at events to inform producers of the Weld Producer Food Hub Project activities and garner interest and support. The brochure was distributed at the Colorado Farm to School Task Force presentation on January 24, 2013 and at the Colorado Farm Show in January 2013. See Appendix 6 for the brochure.

❖ **Colorado Farm Show 2013**

For the third consecutive year Healthy Weld 2020 had a booth at the Colorado Farm Show held annually in Greeley. The Colorado Farm Show is an opportunity to meet producers in their own environment, introduce them to the Food Hub Project and gauge their interest in participating, briefly survey them on relevant topics and generally build rapport. From comments received, producers are becoming familiar with Healthy Weld 2020's presence at such events and are interested learning of the food hub's progress.

Going with a Partner Based Food Hub Model

When evaluating existing infrastructure against the food hub mapping document, there are no Food Hub identified services (cooler/storage aggregation, processing and distribution) currently existing at one facility. During a meeting with Weld County School District 6, Weld Food Bank and Food Bank for Larimer County, a collaborative, partner-based food hub model began to emerge. Each agency has upgraded or is upgrading their commercial kitchen facility with state of the art processing equipment that will allow them to minimally-or-above process produce into season extension products.

- WCSD6 can provide limited season extension processing (dependent on kitchen availability) and cooler/storage services, and refrigerated distribution to school districts.
- Weld Food Bank and Food Bank for Larimer County can provide limited season extension processing (dependent on kitchen availability), and limited freezer holding time (4 days maximum) before product needs to be transferred to longer term storage for distribution. Both food banks also have refrigerated trucks for distribution during non-food bank use.

❖ **Tri-Agency Collaboration**

The Food Hub Agency Collaboration Chart (below) summarizes the storage, processing, logistics, resources, needs, limitations and existing cross-collaboration for Weld County School District 6, Weld Food Bank and Food Bank for Larimer County.

In addition,

- LoCo Food Distribution has the most flexibility to pick up from satellite drop-off storage sites throughout the county and deliver to processors as well as customers. While not at the initial meeting, they have repeatedly shown interest in collaborating for local food distribution where it is needed and fits their current activities.

❖ **Pilot Project Assessment and Timeline**

In a follow up meeting, Weld County School District 6 and Weld Food Bank continued the discussion of a collaboration arrangement meeting each agency's needs and logistical capacity. The Food Bank for Larimer County was not able to attend the meeting, but has expressed interest in participating in this phase of collaboration.

An inter-agency assessment on various topics similar and also different to each agency was discussed and is noted in the following chart. Subsequently, the conversation progressed to testing the pilot project for viability before further commitment and the Weld Food Bank suggested starting with an existing over abundant supply of donated bell peppers. A tentative timeline is introduced in the third chart below.

Each agency participating in the pilot project brings unique services and skills to the collaboration. The pilot project will consist of using surplus donated bell peppers from the Weld Food Bank (used for animal feed currently) and then processing those peppers at the School District 6 kitchen. The purpose of the pilot project is to establish the operational limitations and improvement areas for a partner based food hub prior to the development of full collaboration policies. The results of the pilot project are intended to serve as the backdrop for future collaborations and to foster participation between other agencies that may not have previously considered the potential of a partner based food hub model.

Tri- Agency Collaboration Chart

	Food Bank for Larimer County (LFB)	Weld Food Bank (WFB)	Weld County School District 6 (SD6)
Storage	Limited, On-Demand. Potential capacity for processed frozen goods 48-72 hour hold (approximate 4 day processing volume) in kitchen specific freezer space.	Limited, On-Demand, Potential capacity for processed frozen goods 48-72 hour hold (approximate 4 day processing volume) in kitchen specific freezer space.	Dry storage limited, expanding refrigeration. Large walk-in freezer is currently under-utilized.
Processing	Undergoing kitchen expansion, operational June 2013. Kitchen facility during summer is mainly breakfast/lunch. Facility is available after 2 pm. During the rest of the year, less meals however more prep processing which limits facility use to early AM or later PM. Mon-Fri operation, off hours available. New kitchen expansion should allow processing similar to Weld: minimal frozen season extension and limited frozen processed foods. Limited ability for cleaning field crops.	Realistic option of service, year-round with limitations during June-Aug: minimal (frozen: season extension vegetables, fruits) and limited frozen processed foods: soups, sauces. Limited ability for cleaning field crops	Mid-May-July = lightest period, Dec = half month open, regular school year: bulk of heavy work completed by 1 PM. Full-time staff available until 5:30/6 PM. More part-time personnel that would like to be full time. Prefer clean produce from farms.
Logistics	More pick-up, rather than deliveries. Reciprocal delivery relationship with Weld Food Bank.	Doing more deliveries than Larimer. Logistical support scheduled based on priority. 15 miles 5/days a week, 30 miles: 3/week, Prairie Run: 1-2/month.	Refrigerated truck service limited use to district needs.
Resources	Processing (and sorting) is based on community volunteer hours. Sorting somewhat subjective to individual assessment. Labor includes 2.5 full time staff. Kitchen processing mainly depends on volunteers. Refrigerated box trucks.	Processing (and sorting) is based on community volunteer hours. Sorting somewhat subjective to individual assessment. Labor includes 2 full time staff, kitchen processing mainly dependent on volunteer staff. Refrigerated Box trucks.	USDA FTS Grant will fund blast chillers, produce wash sink, vacuum packaging. Labor includes one Executive Chef and 14 Full time/part time staff. Currently have two refrigerated trucks that are 10+ years old. They are purchasing a new refrigerated delivery truck this spring. We have docks that can accommodate both semi trucks and small deliver van vehicles.
Needs	Storage, SOP development, coordination, Producer focused Bid/RFP process training (administrative support)	Storage, SOP development, coordination, Producer focused Bid/RFP process training (administrative support). Perception from local producers: not a buyer (new for 2013)	Storage, SOP development, coordination, Producer focused Bid/RFP process training (administrative support); staff education, business plan development, traceability.
Limitations	Mostly pick-up's no deliveries, kitchen space expansion planned for 1st and 2nd quarter of 2013, volunteer labor for processing, no weekend processing	No available long-term cold storage, must rely on volunteer labor for processing, no weekend processing	Limited dock times for deliveries , cannot rely upon volunteer labor for processing
Existing cross-collaboration	Actively deliver to each other's facility: Backhauling through this project would be great.		Weld Food Bank currently receives regular food donations from D6

Tri- Agency Pilot Project Assessment

Food Bank for Larimer County (LFB)	Weld Food Bank (WFB)	Weld County School District 6 (SD6)
Inter-Agency Aggregation	Benefit: purchasing power through volume buying from FTS producer awarded bids. WFB is interested in utilizing NoCO Coop bids as a conduit to attract additional local products at WFB price points. WFB has truck maximum capacity and will prioritize WFB needs with SD6.	Benefit: WFB can be receiving agent for SD6 and can process onfarm pickup of produce and single point of delivery from multiple farms. SD6 can still receive product direct from Producers who choose to deliver direct to SD6.
	Benefit to producer: no additional infrastructure required for storage and delivery, allowing more producers to participate in FTS program (volume selling). Benefit to agencies: potential lower price for produce products to WFB. WFB can facilitate pickup/delivery instead of producer-responsible delivery of product	
Inter-Agency Distribution	SD6 will deliver processed products to WFB after processing	WFB will deliver from farm to either their or SD6 facility as open storage availability exists (dependent on each facility's non-peak storage availability). Ideally, WFB will deliver SD6's aggregated volume of product direct to SD6.
Inter-Agency Processing	Processes, aggregation, distribution and other topics will be similar for LFB	Lower cost because volunteer pool can be used onsite/off site for processing of product that will be received and distributed by WFB
Inter-Agency Processing		Lower cost: staff processed foods, or volunteers can be utilized with proper registration through SD6 process for in house use (closed system). Will have to confirm SD6's accounting procedures for offering third party processing services for non-SD6 use (open system to WFB, LFB, other SDs, etc). Will need address liability insurance component/requirements from SD6's legal department.
Inter-Agency Agreements	WFB receive SD6 Vendor Status as approved supplier	SD6 receive WFB Agency Status as approved produce receiving agent
Food Safety	Each facility has existing food safety protocols and requirements in place for receiving produce. Additional requirements and licensing may apply for processing and distribution of processed products to other agencies.	
Documentation	Documentation of appropriate agreements, MOU's, food safety licensing, etc pertinent to each agency and activity	
Spring 2013 Pilot Crop	WFB has reliable over abundance of donated bell peppers that are sometimes not received due to market saturation. Bell peppers will serve as the test product for interagency processing. Food bank donated food is stringently regulated as to distribution and must go to target populations or utilized as animal feed. An intended outcome of this collaboration is to maximize the amount of donated food that reaches high need populations serviced by the participating agencies.	
	All three agencies work with same at-risk populations: SD6 for children during school day/school year; FB for families at non-school hours.	
Additional Programming Possibilities	Identified a potential apple processing partnership with Ela Family Farms for Apple slices. Major need is to secure volume needs to offset infrastructure needs. SD6 see apple slices as a potential product item: price points are important. Pursue a followup conversation with Ela on their needs to formulate pilot program?	

Tri- Agency Pilot Project Timeline (tentative)

Dates	Weld School District 6 (SD6)	Weld Food Bank (EFB)	Food Bank for Larimer Bank (LFB)	WCPHE & RFCO
Apr-13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Will share with Weld Food Bank NoCO COOP local food bid results Once Awardees are determined, communication will be shared re: Tri-Agency Hub collaboration pilot program for coordination Will investigate WFB's set up within FNS as a "Vendor" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Weld Food Bank will share pilot program with decision makers at Weld Food Bank for approval. Will share pilot program with LFB's key decision makers Identify within SD6's Bid responses, corresponding produce products and producers for purchase. WFB will set up SD6 as "Agency" status 	Potentially similar to WFB	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Receive shared info to assimilate for program tracking. Info will include: products, volume, program partners cost analysis, producer impact. Info will be used to strategize future programming needs. Potentially assist with coordination support. Identify and share additional funding support.
Apr-13	A follow-up Tri-Agency meeting (either in person or telephone) will be set up to map out additional timeline items.			
Spring 2013	<p>Test processing of bell peppers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> WFB will supply (in gratis) bell peppers to SD6. SD6 will test process (see: http://food.unl.edu/web/preservation/freezing-peppers). Processing component for bell peppers are slices, diced utilizing commercial processing equipment: http://www.hobartcorp.com/products/food-prep/food-processors/continuous-feed/. However, Juliene option could be used: see video options under "plate selection guide." Commerical processor can yield a min. of 600* (see equipment specs) lbs per/hour. SD6 will need to investigate permissable allowances to become a 3rd party processor 			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Receive shared info to assimilate for program tracking. Info will include: products, volume, program partners cost analysis, producer impact. Info will be used to strategize future programming needs. Potentially assist with coordination support. Identify and share additional funding support.
May-13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed FTS Producers and Products that will participate in the Tri-Agency program. Will share delivery schedule and anticipated volume with WFB 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Add SD6's FTS delivery needs into anticipated farm pick-up, potentially identify distribution capacity (?) Share with SD6 potential summer storage needs so SD6 can plan accordingly. 		

Lessons Learned 2012-2013

Obstacles are encountered throughout the development of any project. That holds true with the Weld Producer Food Hub Project. Below is a brief summary of three projects with areas of improvement identified. Healthy Weld 2020 has already begun taking steps to increase future producer responses.

❖ Colorado Produce Growers Food Safety Plan Workshop

Weld County's was the least well attended in the workshop series. Of the producers that registered, only about half showed up. While the specific reasons cannot be entirely identified, it does seem to confirm the Weld County producer culture characteristics previously identified.

❖ Cultivation Event

The event was originally planned for November 1, 2012, but was postponed due to low producer response. It was learned that because of the mild winter, crops were still being harvested. Even so, with the December 6, 2012 date most producers were rushing to harvest late season crops before an expected hard freeze coinciding with the date.

❖ Developing Producer Rapport

More effort needs to be put into the acceptance by producers regarding the Weld County Department of Public Health & Environment's involvement in developing a producer food hub. To date, Healthy Weld 2020 is still often thought of as the 'regulatory agency' instead of an education and technical resource division of the health department.

Action Steps for 2013-2014

Implementation of specific action steps to address the issues and help farmers overcome the identified barriers will be the focus of grant year 2013-2014. 2012-2013 was spent understanding the issues and identification of producer barriers to selling locally. Some of the activities listed below are designed to re-brand Healthy Weld 2020 increasing acceptance with producers to overcome the 'we're from the government and we're here to help' resistance.

❖ Continued Tri-Agency Partner Collaboration

With Weld County School District 6, Weld Food Bank and Food Bank for Larimer County to develop the partner food hub model.

❖ Continued Pass-Through Aggregation Facility Development

Identify and establish multiple sites.

❖ Continue Building Producer and Local Distributor Networks and Rapport

Through networking, educational training, and Farm to School opportunities, and sharing this information with networks. In the course of 2012-2013 activities, Healthy Weld 2020 identified and contacted twenty-five additional Weld County producers and one additional local food distributor.

In order to improve producer rapport, Healthy Weld 2020 has created a marketing brochure to inform and engage target audiences through various outreach opportunities.

❖ **Food Safety Training Classes** with on-farm consulting summer 2014.

The Food Safety and Modernization Act (2011) places increasing emphasis on preventative measures to combat food illness outbreaks. The new regulations place increased emphasis on food safety plan development that some producers are not prepared to meet. Even producers who are likely to be exempt from the Food Safety Modernization Act are increasingly finding market-driven requirements for food safety plans as a condition of sale or distribution. This training will help them not only meet these regulations, but also equip them to meet farm to school as well as other local marketplace requirements.

This program is modeled off of the successful Boulder County and Larimer County Extension Beginning Farmer Program and would be a detailed extension of one of their classes – Basics of Food Safety.

Course Characteristics:

- This course will consist of a series of weekly classes, each covering a specific topic. At the completion of the science-based Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) food safety plan training program each producer completing the program will have at least a draft food safety plan for their farm for the following growing season.
- Each producer completing the program will receive one non-regulatory, technical-assistance related on-farm consultation visit during the growing season. Consultations are designed to improve the implementation of good agricultural practices by providing producer follow-up support in evaluating their food safety plan's effectiveness, identifying any problems encountered, and connecting them with available problem-solving resources.
- Potentially, all class participants will be invited back after the completion of the first growing season to discuss and share implementation successes and challenges, and exchange peer expertise to improve Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). A guest speaker with food safety /industry knowledge and expertise will be invited.

Objectives:

- Increase produce growers' knowledge and capacity to mitigate the risks of microbial contamination on their farm.
- Assist Weld County small to mid-sized producers in developing a science-based GAPs food safety plan specific to their farm.

Curriculum Development

Partnering with Weld County CSU Extension Office, CSU and Cornell University (land grant schools) for curriculum development and Cornell University Produce Safety Alliance resources. The program consists of a series of 8 classes, each covering a specific GAPs topic: 1) importance of good agricultural practices in fruit and vegetable production, 2) worker health and hygiene, 3) water use,

4) post harvest water use, 5) soil amendments, 6) cleaning and sanitation, 7) traceability and recall and 8) crisis management.

For each topic:

- Develop learning objectives that the producer will know or be able to do,
- Develop interactive, hands on, experiential learning activities,
- Develop topical case studies to evaluate- Colorado pertinent if possible,
- Develop resources to help producers,
- Identify guest speakers – intermediate/experienced producers/purchasers to give relevance to topic.

Provide Resources on additional GAPs areas of concern not covered (i.e. Wildlife and Domestic Animals, etc) or other practices (petting zoos, U-pick farms, etc) that may be encountered on the farm.

Course Promotion Ideas - Finding Producers to Attend and Guest Speak

Going TO producers who might be interested will be necessary – direct marketing and promotion.

- Weld, Boulder and Larimer County Extension Offices.
- School Districts – who have they worked with/have turned down because no FSP?
- Farmer Markets-Carrie Shimada
- Seed stores
- Nurseries – products/supplies
- Farm Equipment companies
- LoCo Food Distribution - producer and buyer pools, also maybe as a speaker from distributor point of view
- Fresh Pack- producer and buyer pools, also maybe as a speaker from distributor point of view

Still to Be Determined:

- **Date/time of class, time of year** – There are pros and cons to fall and winter class offerings. Because of weather variables, the growing season could extend into early December. Because of producers who participate in year round farmer markets or CSA, early to mid- week is likely to be the best time to offer the training. Based on partner conversations, all agree that the classes should end by March 1st to accommodate early season planting preparations.
- **Guest Speakers** – Content expertise representing producers, distributors and buyer perspectives on importance of topic, or food safety in general. Credentials/requirements: have a working FSP or require producers to have, other?
- **Certificate of Completion?** Benefits??
- **Charge for Class** – with fee returned upon attendance of majority of classes
- **Presentation of Food Safety Plan** - Random (or each farm) present ‘homework’ on previous class topic (accountability factor for completion)

A meeting with Martha Sullins and Marisa Bunning from CSU, and Keith Maxey, Weld Extension Director was held in January 2013 to discuss curriculum, with positive response. The CSU meeting notes are included in Appendix 7

❖ **Producer and Buyer Focused Educational Topics** – beneficial to all attendees, coupled with Cultivation Events to respect busy schedules.

- On-Farm tour – get to know your host farm
- Farm to school bid responding
- Packing standards

❖ **Producer Focused Cultivation Events** – traveling locations pertinent to producers and buyers. Potential locations include:

- Leffler Family Farms
- Weld Food Bank
- Fresh Pack Produce

❖ **Food Hub Advisory Panel** – continue the advisory panel to advise and guide Healthy Weld 2020 in implementation of Food Hub, however, changing to quarterly meetings.

Conclusion

Working within a food system to bring about positive changes for both food producers and food consumers is a delicate balance. Existing projects and policy provide a good understanding of the fundamental components necessary to develop a food hub. Healthy Weld 2020 has confirmed the high unmet local food demand and an existing void of producers who can meet that demand.

The process of designing a food hub specific to the needs of Weld County residents has brought the potential of a partner based food hub into focus. Partners, infrastructure and educational programs are beginning to consolidate into real solutions to keeping local foods local in Weld County and improving access to those foods for all of our residents.

Ultimately, the success of this project will depend on a network of robust partnerships all serving the interests of their individual organizations, within the framework of a larger food system. In the years to come, it is anticipated this partner approach will serve as a guidepost for other communities with similar resources that are looking for ways to improve the health of residents and the vitality of their local food system.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Food Hub Advisory Panel Meeting Notes

Appendix 2 - Food Hub Essential Functions Mapped

Appendix 3 -Producers GIS Mapped

Appendix 4 - Food Safety & Farm to School Procurement Document

Appendix 5 - Cultivation Event

Appendix 6- Weld Producer Food Hub Brochure

Appendix 7 – CSU Food Safety Curriculum Meeting Notes